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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000546

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: BAGHDAD SECURITY PLAN -- VIEWS FROM THE STREET

Classified By: Classified by Political Counselor Margaret Scobey for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Baghdad residents have expressed cautious optimism about the new Baghdad Security Plan (BSP) to poloff, PRT Baghdad officers, and other embassy staff in recent days. Overall, their comments hit two major themes: (1) that residents are pinning their hopes on this plan, and (2) that the credibility and success of the plan depend on the extensive refereeing of Iraqi security forces by American and coalition forces. Some contacts said they already felt safer, and that the sheer visual increase in security forces demonstrated commitment by the U.S. and GOI. Despite this optimism, however, some Sunni leaders assessed that Sunni residents could react negatively if they perceived they were being targeted by Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). Citizens have also begun to hoard food and supplies in anticipation of limited or no-mobility conditions behind lockdowns, curfew extensions and security operations. Some of our interlocutors expressed concern that if the plan fails, the violence will deepen. End Summary.

CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM FROM ALL SIDES

¶2. (C) PolOffs and Embassy local staff over the past week have queried a number of Baghdad neighborhood leaders -- as well as our man-in-the street type contacts -- about their views of the new Baghdad Security Plan. At the same time, many of our interlocutors have raised the issue without prompting. We heard some nuanced differences in the views between Sunni and Shi'a. However, practically all of them expressed hope for the success of the plan and assessed that it had already begun to have an impact.

¶3. (c) Shi'a optimism appeared widespread. A District Advisory Council (DAC) member from the Abu Cheer neighborhood (Rasheed District - a Shia sub-area within a predominantly Sunni area) asserted: "The residents are comforted by this new plan, they are happier, and want to participate as best they can. They are fed up by the violence." Another DAC member from the Zafaranya neighborhood (Karadah district) stated: "People in our area knew that the plan was starting a week ago. This week has been good, these efforts represent a good step, and the people are very hopeful. But it is really the last hope.8

¶4. (C) A Shi'a resident from the Fadil neighborhood (Rusafa district) reported that: "People are afraid about what will happen, but have hope. The plan started today (Note: referring to February 14), and people believe that it is good that they are targeting everyone, both militias and terrorists." In Sad'r City, one medical doctor who said he had been forced to join Moqtadda al-Sadr's Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS) party explained that "this plan is the last hope. If it does not work, residents will either flee the country en masse, or civil war will happen. I myself will

take my family out of the country. That being said, there is a lot of optimism; people are tired of the violence."

¶5. (C) On February 15, Sunni Endowment chair Sheikh Sammaraei called poloff to say that he was heartened by reports coming in that the situation in Baghdad was improving.

¶6. (SBU) Other Sunnis were more cautious. A local Sunni leader from the Ameriya neighborhood (Mansour district) said: "Residents believe the plan will start this week. Maybe it will work, maybe not, but we hope it will." Another Monsour resident expressed "the security plan is our only hope. People think it will succeed because of the involvement of the US." A Sunni Abu Ghuraib resident said his neighbors "are ready to fully cooperate, because they are fed up with the violence and with the poor security situation as a whole. They are putting all their hopes on this, and if it does not succeed, everyone will leave Baghdad. This is truly the last chance."

¶7. (SBU) Another Sunni resident of the Khadra district asserted "people in the neighborhood are worried and are a little afraid about how the plan will affect or even target them. But they are seeing that it as much better than the previous two plans, because it is targeting both Shi'a militia and Sunni terrorists. Still, residents are afraid."

U.S. MUST "BE IN THE LEAD FOR PLAN TO WORK"

¶8. (SBU) Sunni and Shi'a alike valued the U.S. presence. A Shi'a from the Abu Cheer neighborhood (Rasheed District - a Shia sub-area within a predominantly Sunni area) asserted

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that: "For this plan to succeed, the US must the lead. The perception right now is that the U.S. is in fact leading operations, so that is why we feel confident." This emphasis on the importance of U.S. participation was echoed by the doctor from Sad'r City: "We see the U.S. is committed and that helps"

¶8. (SBU) A Sunni from the Abu Ghuraib neighborhood noted that "everyone wants the U.S. to play a big role, they are even angry with Al Qaida which has killed many people in the neighborhood, including Sunni. People lack trust in the government and the security forces, so the U.S. role is very important." A Shi'a resident from the Zafaranya neighborhood (Karadah district) observed that: "A week ago MOI forces withdrew from our neighborhood and were replaced by Iraqi Army forces that set up numerous car checkpoints. The Iraqi Army deployed to this neighborhood has also been very interactive with the residents, and have been soliciting feedback and even complaints. They are protecting fuel stations and overall the residents are feeling very confident with this group."

¶9. (SBU) A Shi'a from the Abu Cheer neighborhood (Rasheed District - a Shia sub-area within a predominantly Sunni area) stated that: "We are seeing an influx of Iraqi Army and Police teams, and the high numbers of these security forces are making people feel more secure, and less likely to bring their weapons with them. The residents are hoping for success with this plan especially since militias and terrorists have already started to disappear from our streets. We also saw that on February 14 there was no car bomb in Baghdad, so that is already a success."

¶10. (SBU) Meanwhile, a Sunni resident from the Ameriya neighborhood (Mansour district) agreed: "The high number of U.S. and Iraqi army on the street is already making the residents feel more comfortable."

A DELICATE BALANCE? - SUNNIS COULD REACT

IF TARGETTED

¶11. (C) At the same time, many of our Sunni interlocutors expressed concern that Sunni residents would react negatively if they perceive themselves to be targetted by Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). Sunni Vice President Tareq al-Hashimim said he had heard reports that only ISF were conducting raids in some areas. He emphasized his belief that Coalition Forces needed to have a more visible presence.

¶12. (C) A contact from the Ameriya neighborhood (Mansour district - known for its violence/insurgency issues; a very Sunni area) further outlined Sunni apprehension: "People in our area are afraid of this plan because of the sectarian nature of the government. There are bad rumors spreading about this plan, specifically that the government will take away our weapons and the militias will be free to attack us. The only way that this plan will work is if the U.S. is visibly accompanying the Iraqi security forces when they come into the neighborhood." Further in the conversation, the same contact cautioned that should the Sunni perceive that they are being singled out for abuse by the ISF they will strike back." He stressed "please tell the Embassy that the Iraqi Army (IA) must not do the house searches without U.S. presence. In the past, when IA has done house searches, they have beat and hurt the residents, and only stop when they see a U.S. soldier coming."

¶13. (C) One Embassy Foreign Service National employee repeated the belief that Sunnis in some quarters of Baghdad could react with violence if there is a perception that the ISF is disproportionately targetting them. "Residents trust the Americans," she said, "but many Sunnis believe the Iraqi military is largely Shi'a -- they worry about a crackdown." In the Sunni area of Yarmouk, post received reports February 15 of erratic shooting in the street, reportedly sparked by rumored militia activity. One resident expressed concern that a bombing the same morning had shattered hope that calm had finally come to the city.

PUTTING UP WITH CHECKPOINTS AND TRAFFIC

¶14. (SBU) Sunnis and Shi'a alike stated that they found the new checkpoints frustrating. A Shi'a from the Zafaranya neighborhood (Karadah district) stated that: "For the first time, these checkpoints appear to be thorough and are effective, but the down side is that there have been massive traffic jams in the neighborhood in the realm of 2-3 hours just to move 50 meters." This was echoed by a Sunni from

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Mansour district: "People are aware of this plan because of the Prime Minister's announcements, and it has already started in our neighborhoods. Residents, however, are extremely bothered by bad traffic caused by checkpoints. Sometimes we wait for hours to go through checkpoints that are scarcely ten meters apart."

HORDING FOOD AND SUPPLIES

¶15. (C) Members of the Adhamiyah District Advisory Council (DAC) appreciated the economic component of the plan. Three Sunni DAC members told poloffs that reducing unemployment was a critical component of security. "Since this is the first security plan that has an economic component, we are hopeful," they stated. Regardless of outlook, the DAC members noted that citizens had begun to hoard food and supplies in anticipation of limited or no-mobility conditions behind lockdowns, curfew extensions and security operations.

COMMENT

¶16. (C) All local Baghdad leaders and residents with whom we spoke said they had more faith in this plan than the previous ones. Several said that the February 14 comments about the plan by President Bush demonstrated to them that the U.S. was committed. They also said that they believed the plan is more likely to work than previous efforts because it is clear that the plan intends to target both militias and terrorists alike. Universally, there remained complaints about the how slow the new checkpoints were moving. Nonetheless, as one Baghdad resident told poloff, "we're certainly willing to tolerate the inconvenience, if it means this plan will work."

SPECKHARD